



THE ANALOG FOLKSONOMY

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Sticker Art as Urban Folksonomy

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I. Introduction: The Collision

I recently watched *Sticker Movie*, a documentary that frames sticker culture as a global, colorful patchwork of stories. Shortly after, while digging through a collection on the Internet Archive, I stumbled across the technical term **Folksonomy**. It was a collision of two worlds: a visceral street culture and a dry information science concept. But once you connect them, you can't see the city the same way again.

To understand why, we must first look at how we organize information. In a traditional library, order is **Taxonomic**. An expert decides where the book goes. The structure is top-down, rigid, and exclusive. "This is History." "This is Science." The user has no say in the architecture.

Our cities are designed the same way. Urban planners and the state act as the librarians. They define the function of every surface: "This is a billboard (Commerce)." "This is a traffic control cabinet (Infrastructure)." "This is a 'No Loitering' sign (Law)." The city is presented to the citizen as a **Read-Only** document.

But Thomas Vander Wal gave us a different model: **Folksonomy**. This describes a "bottom-up" system where users tag content with their own words to make it findable. Instead of one expert filing a photo under "Architecture," thousands of users tag it "Paris," "Vacation," "Mood," and "Home."

Sticker art is the physical application of this principle. It is **The Analog Folksonomy**. When a sticker artist slaps a vinyl graphic onto the back of a crossing signal, they are "tagging" the physical world. They are re-indexing the city, transforming a piece of invisible infrastructure into a node of public meaning. They are asserting that the city is a **Read/Write** document, open to annotation by the people who live in it.

II. The Logic of Accretion: The Coral Reef

It is tempting to view street art through the metaphor of warfare—a battle between the artist and the cleaner. But a closer look at a "slap wall"—consider the rusted back of a highway sign or the bathroom door of a dive bar—reveals a different biological logic: **Accretion**.

These surfaces behave less like battlefields and more like coral reefs. One artist places a sticker. A month later, another artist places one next to it. A third overlaps them both. The individual ego dissolves into the collective structure.

This creates what has been described as a **Graffiti Mycelium**—an interconnected, living network that grows in the "tunnels" and margins of the built environment. Just as mycelium digests dead matter to create new soil, the sticker community digests the "dead capital" of grey concrete and turns it into a living archive.

This process builds a **Spectral Common**—a shared but unofficial layer of perception that overlays the authorized city. In a zone where visual space is usually sold to the highest bidder (the "Right-of-Rendering"—the exclusive power to decide what appears—claimed by advertisers), the sticker wall creates a pocket of shared bandwidth. It is a space where the community grants itself the right to appear.

III. Pataphysics: Rotating the Space

How does a small adhesive label change a massive city? The answer lies in **Pataphysics**.

Defined as the "science of imaginary solutions", Pataphysics is a cognitive tool for shifting perspective. It functions like a kaleidoscope: the raw facts of the world (the shards) stay the same, but by rotating the mirrors, we change the pattern.

A sticker acts as the pivot point for this rotation.

- **The Normal View:** A standard "Hello My Name Is" badge is a tool for bureaucratic identification.
- **The Pataphysical View:** That same badge, filled with a hand-drawn character and slapped on a riot fence, becomes a subversion of identity. It invites play.

The sticker does not destroy the fence; it **rotates the meaning**. It shifts the "angle of incidence", forcing the viewer to see the object not just as authority, but as a canvas. It proves that the "inevitability" of the grey city was just a trick of the light—a "House of Cards" that looks solid only from a single, forced angle.

IV. The Rabbit in the Margins

This practice is not new. In fact, the sticker artist is the direct descendant of the **Medieval Illuminator**.

In the 13th and 14th centuries, monks scribing holy texts would often doodle in the margins. These drawings, known as *marginalia*, were often irreverent, absurd, and subversive. A common motif was the "Killer Rabbit"—a hare wielding an axe or a club, hunting the hunter.

This was the **Monde Renversé** (The World Turned Upside Down). The center of the page was for the "Serious Text" (God, King, Law), but the margins belonged to the "Folk." The rabbit in the margin didn't burn the bible; it humanized it. It provided a pressure valve for the strict hierarchy of the day.

Modern sticker culture performs the exact same function. The "Serious Text" is the skyline of banks and government buildings. The "Marginalia" is the sticker on the back of the utility box. The artist, like the medieval rabbit, operates in the thin strips of space that power forgot to police. They are not destroying the book; they are illuminating the edges.

This lineage extends even further back, to the scratched graffiti of Pompeii and the handprints in prehistoric caves. It is the ancient, stubborn human insistence on annotation: *I was here. I saw this. I added to it.*

V. Conclusion: The Living Index

Sticker Movie describes this culture as a "colorful patchwork of stories." This is precise. A patchwork is not designed; it is stitched together from scraps.

By layering names, jokes, characters, and colors over the monochrome skin of the city, sticker artists are building a **Living Index**. Like all folksonomies, its power lies not in authority, but in accumulation.

The legacy of sticker culture is not in any single image, but in the survival of the network itself. It is the proof that the city is not finished. As long as there is a margin, there will be a rabbit waiting to fill it.

COVER ART IMAGE BY: <https://www.instagram.com/chrisrwk/>

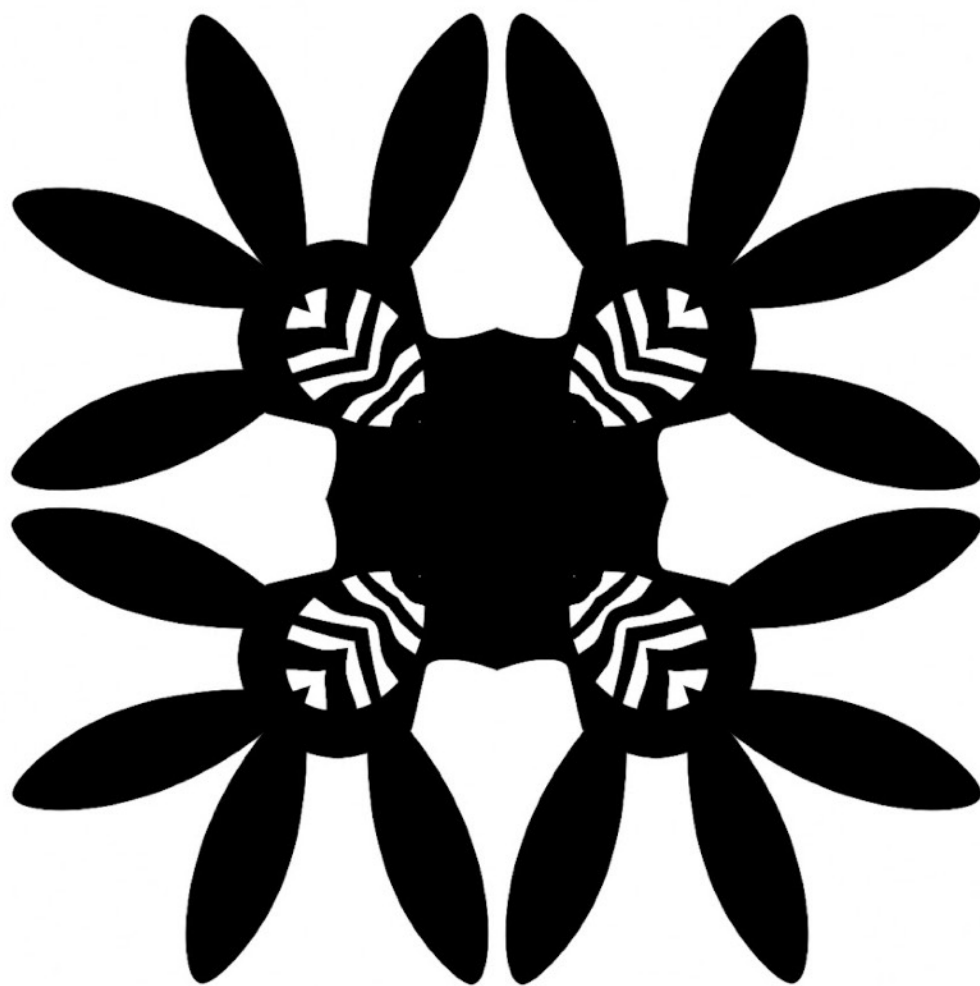
STICKER MOVIE: <https://www.instagram.com/stickermovie/>

IA FOLKSCANOMY: <https://archive.org/details/folkscanomy>
(where I discovered Folksonomy)

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This was written through a collaboration between a human author and AI systems acting as analytical tools. The machines provided structure; the human provided judgment. Nothing appears here that the author did not personally create, refine, choose, and claim.

**HEY JOSIANE,
GOOD MORNING.
SUM BUNNY LOVES YOU!!!**



FREE FLASH